

Reem N.

The Stars Don't Lie.

"Are you afraid?" I asked Ellie. She was silent for a moment; her gaze fixed upon the night sky.

"No, not really" she whispered. "I kinda already prepared myself for this day."

Ellie and I are stargazers: people who can read the stars and inform others of their good fortune. But Ellie was different. She was cursed to read only one thing, our time of death. However, she had never told anyone when their final day will arrive; she feared that they may not be able to live their life to the fullest. Physically, Ellie also differed. No one had seen silver hair like her own, and her lavender eyes rivalled that of a violet flower.

Ever since she read the stars, I had never seen Ellie smile.

"You know something" she spoke suddenly, "these stars have been dead for thousands of years." She turned to face me. "It's funny how things that don't even exist could tell us so much."

My eyes lit up at the thought that crossed my mind. "You're right!" I said, "if they don't exist, then maybe your death isn't as close as the stars claim it to be!"

She frowned before she looked up at the sky. She was reading again. Ellie wanted to believe that maybe I was right, perhaps the stars were lying.

"They're wrong. I'm sure of it!" Placing my hand on her shoulder, I couldn't tell if I was trying to comfort her or myself. She kept looking up at the sky, and I followed her gaze. From the edge of this cliff, I got a clear view of the star-covered night. I could see all the happy and fortunate lives people will live, but I still couldn't smile. I couldn't bring myself to be content when all Ellie could see was death.

"It's not fair," I said.

"I know." She whispered back.

She buried her head beneath her arms. I only turned to her when I saw her shoulders shaking; she was crying. I froze. I felt my heart catch, and my stomach twist.

"Today's the day, isn't it?" My eyes went blurry, and I couldn't see how her shoulders were shaking evermore. Kneeling, I wrapped my arms around her.

"I'm scared." She paused to steady her breathing. "I thought I'd be ready." Looking up at me, I watched the tears stream down her face. "but I met you, and I don't want to leave anymore."

I pulled her in for a hug, squeezing her tightly. We stayed like that for a while, taking this time to cherish each other's company. But the thought that this might be our final embrace still haunted us.

"It's almost time." She pulled away, getting up on her feet. She dusted the dirt off her pants and walked towards the forest. "Don't follow me, please, I don't want you to see." Without another word, she headed down the dark forest trail, never turning back. Still seated on the ground, I kept my eyes on Ellie's retreating form. Slowly, I picked myself up and wiped my tears away with the back of my hand. I called out to her, but she didn't respond. I wanted to hold her hand when she left; she shouldn't be by herself in such a situation. I chased after Ellie, but I quickly lost sight of her silver hair.

Too busy trying to spot her, I failed to notice what I was walking into, and I accidentally stumbled on one of the thick roots of a tree. In a blink, the ground that I stood on was no longer there, and below me sat

Reem N.

nothing but a bottomless pit. The night grew darker, and the air got colder; I was falling, and I felt sick and numb on the inside.

I'm going to die, I thought myself.

A familiar silver and lavender caught my eye. In a moment, Ellie grabbed my outstretched arm and pulled me forward, but as a result, all my weight had shifted to her form. She was in my place now. She was falling down the bottomless pit. Instinctively, I reached out to her, yelling her name.

But I couldn't get to her in time; we both knew that. Despite her impending fate, Ellie did something I had never seen her do in a long time: she smiled. Helplessly, I watched her disappear into the dark.

My heart was pounding, but my chest still felt hollow. My mind was shutting down, unable to think of anything except for one thought.

"The stars don't lie."